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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001359

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [PINR](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMESE PRIME MINISTER OUSTED? CRESCENDO OF
RUMORS REACHES A FEVERISH PITCH

REF: A. RANGOON 1345

[B](#). RANGOON 1337

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1.(C) Summary: Rangoon is abuzz on October 19 with rumors that a Burmese regime internal power struggle, pitting Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt's Military Intelligence (MI) against the regular military led by Senior General Than Shwe and Vice Senior General Maung Aye, may have resulted in significant changes within the ruling junta. According to a senior diplomatic contact with excellent GOB access, PM Khin Nyunt "is no longer in his position." Reports are credible that tensions within the SPDC are serious and competing economic interests and/or corruption may be at the root of current internal struggles.

[2](#). (C) As of COB, the streets and sidewalks of Rangoon bustled with a normal amount of activity and there appears to be no immediate danger to AmCits or Embassy personnel. We've seen several truckloads of troops being mustered in downtown Rangoon (a fairly common sight) and have heard of one regiment being moved into the capital from an outlying area. According to a variety of sources, numerous senior MI officers have been taken in for questioning, and police and military units have been placed on standby alert. Khin Nyunt's whereabouts are currently unknown and his office shelved a meeting scheduled for October 19 with the dean of the diplomatic corps. His abrupt ouster or detention would be significant, although we would not expect an immediate change in current SPDC policies that are aimed at consolidating power, achieving national unity, suppressing the democratic opposition, and bolstering legitimacy through regional support. End Summary.

The Army versus MI?

[3](#). (C) The long-simmering economic rivalry (refs) between MI and the rest of the military apparently came to a head October 18 and 19 in Rangoon with numerous senior MI officers reportedly being arrested, detained, and/or taken in for questioning by regular army troops. Some relatively light troop deployments around Rangoon are about the only outward indication of anything amiss, although such movements are quite common in the capital and elsewhere in Burma. We have heard no reports of violence associated with the rumored detentions or of any threat to AmCits or U.S. Embassy personnel.

[4](#). (C) According to Embassy sources, soldiers and police have been placed on stand-by alert and we observed six or eight truckloads of soldiers gathering at a muster point in downtown Rangoon. According to a reliable diplomatic source, one regiment of troops has been brought into the capital from a base just north of Rangoon. Some contacts tell us that cell phone usage was cut for a little over an hour on the evening of October 18, but we cannot independently verify that.

[5](#). (C) Some government offices, including the Ministry of Home Affairs which oversees the Burmese Police, canceled routine meetings scheduled with diplomats on October 19. However, the Rangoon international airport, official media, and commercial sector all functioned normally. Throughout the day, Rangoon bustled with a routine amount of activity, including markets, schools, offices, public transportation, and rush hour commuting.

PM Khin Nyunt,s Fate?

[6](#). (C) Well-placed sources variously claim that Prime Minister Khin Nyunt has been detained for questioning, placed under house arrest, sacked, and/or outright arrested. On October 18, the Prime Minister reportedly made an official trip to and from Mandalay (Burma's second largest city) and was detained or questioned upon his return in the evening. According to a senior diplomatic contact with excellent GOB access, the Prime Minister "is no longer in his position."

[7](#). (C) Khin Nyunt's office postponed a meeting previously scheduled for the early evening of October 19 with the dean of the diplomatic corps (the Singaporean Ambassador, who

noted that the PM's office was "ambiguous" when advising him of the postponement). As of COB October 19, the Prime Minister's actual whereabouts are unknown. Of note, however, Khin Nyunt and other senior SPDC members are rarely seen about town, other than via daily official media coverage of SPDC meetings, inspections, and "delivering of instructions" to subordinate troops or government entities.

Comment: Opaque and Murky

18. (C) There are no immediate signs (as of COB Tuesday, Rangoon time) that a "coup" has taken place. By all accounts and appearances, the Burmese military junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), remains firmly in control and under the continued leadership of Senior General Than Shwe and Vice Senior General Maung Aye. Developments within the 13-member SPDC, however, are typically more opaque. We have no reason to doubt that recent tensions within the military (reftels) may have, over the past 36 hours, led to the detention and/or interrogation of senior military officials, a possible shuffle within the SPDC itself, or even the arrest and/or ouster of council members.

19. (C) The preponderance of information suggests that PM Khin Nyunt is either detained or out of a job, although we cannot verify this with full certainty. Khin Nyunt, an original member of the military junta that seized power in 1988, is the SPDC's third highest-ranking official and the regime's primary liaison with the country's 17 cease-fire groups as well as with important international partners such as China. His abrupt ouster or detention would be significant, although we would not expect an immediate change in current SPDC policies that are aimed at consolidating power, achieving national unity, suppressing the democratic opposition, and bolstering legitimacy through regional support. The situation may remain murky for the foreseeable future. Further clarification could come from the SPDC itself in the form of an official statement, a public appearance by Khin Nyunt, or the undertaking of planned SPDC activities, such as the anticipated travel to India of SPDC Chairman Than Shwe o/a October 24. End Comment.
Martinez